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Reading is viewed as an integral part of the total language and thinking development of the individual and as an important skill employed for the acquisition of knowledge and self-growth. The teacher is seen as one who clears the lines of communication between pupil and author by carefully assessing the pupil's capacity and the level of the material to be read. Evaluation of the reader's level of thinking, his perceptual handicaps or strengths, the richness of his experiential background, and his language competence are emphasized. An ungraded, continuous progress program is briefly discussed, emphasizing the idea that reading is language and that whatever develops the language facility improves reading. Some goals and methods of the study of language--hence reading--are listed and discussed. Teaching a pupil to comprehend is not seen to rest solely with the reading teacher but rather with all teachers. Separation of reading instruction from the rest of the curriculum and failure to comprehend its nature as a language skill are seen as detrimental to the development of language abilities. References are included. (RT)

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READING AS LANGUAGE

Sessions

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One of the more disturbing aspects of the writer's observation of reading instruction for the past twenty years has been its rapid metamorphosis into a subject area taught in separation from the rest of the curriculum for grades one through twelve. Two essential components of the reading process seem to be ignored -- at a measurable cost -- when reading instruction is departmentalized, compartmentalized, and grade-stratified. The first of these constituents is the understanding of reading as an integral part of the total language and thinking development of the individual; the second, realization that

reading is a skill to be employed for the acquisition of knowledge and self-growth. It has no subject content sacred to its domain unless one is concerned with learning how to teach reading or doing research into the reading process. There seems to be no valid reason, therefore, for teaching reading apart from the rest of the curriculum; rather one might expect it to be taught as part of every subject that involves the use of language. It is difficult to think of exceptions to this last qualification.

The purpose of language -- and of teaching -- is communication. While the linguist generally defines language in terms of articulated, structured, arbitrary vocal sounds, the fact remains that writing is an invention to extend the space/time range of language; and reading is a process of abstracting the communication conveyed by the written-down vocal symbols. In oral communication the transmission takes place through the medium of sound waves; in reading, by means of light waves, but the essential function of language -- to communicate -- remains unaltered.

In the Communications issue of the Kaiser Aluminum News (2) the passage of ideas from one person to another is referred to as "human transactions", and the basic ingredients of the transaction -- whatever the method of symbolization -- are listed as:

Something taken in

Something transformed

Something retained

Something created

Something transmitted

The quality of the message communicated through language symbols depends upon the cognitive level of the sender. The receiver, in turn, must rely upon his power of cognition to assimilate, transform (interpret), and retain the message conveyed. In the happy instance of the receiver possessing a creative facility over and beyond his purely intellectual endowment, the thought or action that he, in turn, transmits may add to the storehouse of human cultural treasures; e.g. Shakespeare's reading of the factual chronicles and his subsequent communication of Hamlet; Michelangelo's transmission of the Biblical account of Genesis to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The language-reading communication at the first level of "something taken in" involves the receiver (pupil), the sender (author) and the teacher who clears the lines for transmission of the message by careful assessment of both the receiver's capacity and the frequency level at which the sender is communicating. Without skillful intermediation on the teacher's part, the reading or communication may fail to occur or the message received will be garbled and misleading. And while we have heard it many times already, it is still very true that assessment of the reader's needs requires consideration of his level of thinking, perceptual handicaps or strengths, richness of experiential background, and language competence.

Evaluation of the perceptual strengths of the receiver aids the teacher in selecting the appropriate method of conveying the message. This is an important area and the brevity with which it is here introduced and dismissed should not be misconstrued. There just is not enough time allotted to deal adequately with the subject in this paper.

It must be stressed that the total reading act encompasses more than the take-in stage although, admittedly, the reading process must begin here. Reading is only one form of language and while in our society it is certainly a most vital one, the teacher needs to understand that it is not the only way in which the human transaction takes place and information transmitted. The point is made, albeit it may seem irrelevant here, because subject teachers often insist a pupil cannot learn because he cannot read. The terms are not synonymous nor do they necessarily have a cause-effect relationship. It is equally important for the teacher to realize that reading can and should be taught as part of the language-communication cluster in every subject area. In this way the teaching of reading rather than being an esoteric and "magical" affair reserved for the reading specialist becomes a matter of communication inseparable from each and every teaching situation.

The concept of reading as language requires not only acceptance on the part of the teacher verbally, but in actual practice. Personal experience leads this observer to feel that many elementary teachers are apt mentally to feel uncomfortable if they do not meet with their reading groups each day for a reading period devoted to work in the basal reader. There is nothing reprehensible in such a procedure -- (Good heavens! we trained them this way) -- but there is a real danger that this may come to be considered all that needs to be done in the course of the day for reading skill development. Whereas in the secondary schools the division between reading instruction and the other curriculum offerings is marked concretely by periods and bells, in the elementary school the separation is often just as definite in the teacher's mind and is reflected in his teaching.

Grouping has been used by teachers for some time to accomplish certain purposes in instruction; the technique of achieving a change in the teacher perception and functioning by a different kind of grouping of the elementary staff and teaching assignments than is customary in the self-contained graded school, is a relatively new but growing development. Emphasis is usually placed when talking about the ungraded school and the continuous progress program on the effect that it has on the pupil and his learning. Equally important from the viewpoint of the elementary supervisor in this case, is the opportunity it affords to break through the limits imposed on the teaching of reading by the notion that it is a separate subject, and to develop teacher understanding

that reading is language; it not only can but should be taught through the medium of the different subject material throughout the entire school day.

In September 1968 one of the elementary schools (grades k-4) in Glen Ridge initiated a change-over to the ungraded continuous progress program. As a first step the previous year, the faculty and the supervisor had struggled to get down on paper a sequential listing of reading skills. One of the supervisor's basic tenets about reading instruction has been the conviction that only the word attack skills can be put into any reasonable kind of sequential development order. (A fairly arbitrary order it turns out as we watch the basal series move the introduction of vowel wounds, dictionary skills, etc. from one grade to another.) The comprehension skills remain the same throughout the grades; it is the level of difficulty of the material and of the concepts to be understood that must be sequentially planned. Such a developmental order already exists in the subject areas to some extent and things are happening <u>there</u> to make the material and ideas presented not only appropriate to the cognitive growth of the youngster, but designed to develop his thinking abilities. In the transmission of subject material the reading skills can be taught in a meaningful and practical manner once the teacher has accepted the idea that reading is language and whatever develops the language or communication facility is, in effect, teaching the child to be a better reader. In this connection it is worth noting

that a recent study (4) reported that spontaneous language during science classes exceeded that in language arts classes by 200 per cent).

Fortified then with a philosophic conviction and an admittedly incomplete listing of what was considered needed for the development of reading skills, the supervisor divided the teaching staff into two teams. To one group was assigned the teaching of Language Arts, reading and Social Studies; the other carried responsibility for Math and Science. (The kindergarten remained self-contained although as the year progressed, some of the kindergartners did not.) The school day was divided into five large time blocks with Language Arts and reading to be taught in the one largest time period.

The Language Arts program currently in use in the Glen Ridge elementary schools is one that lends itself, in the writer's opinion, very well to easing teachers into an understanding and active acceptance of teaching reading as an inseparable component of language. The program is the Nebraska Curriculum for English (1). It is an extension of suggestions made in the Woods Curriculum Workshop of 1961. The basic premise of this program is that children have a need to come in contact with literature, that even children who do not yet read should find attractive those communications of fine literature appropriate to their level of intellect, imagination, and rhythmic sense. Storytelling, modeled and unmodeled, is a foundation activity in this curriculum. The elementary program is divided into

nine units, groups or "pseudo-genres"

folk tales	Adventure stories	other lands and people
fanciful stories	myth	historical fiction
animal stories	fable	biography

This classification serves the purposes of the curriculum in that it allows for stress on certain story elements and thus a sequential development of the principles of the program. Literary works of substantial merit have been selected and those versions or editions of the stories that are most useful to the program or are of the highest degree of literary integrity. The literature is often read to the children (for a major portion of the time in the earliest grade levels). Work in oral language and composition is included in the units.

The makers of the curriculum do not want it confused with a reading program, and they state that the "development of methods for the teaching of reading is the proper concern of the reading expert." One can appreciate the natural concern of the curriculum planners not to infringe upon the discipline of another group of specialists, but their disclaimer only serves to emphasise the exclusion of reading from the rest of the language program and reduces it to the status of a course in code-breaking. Any study of language that involves such goals and methods as the following appear, at least to this writer, most definitely to be teaching reading in its totality:

1. Reading to children and their own story telling are included in this program because its authors believe "The child's basically oral approach to literature will change as he masters reading skills, but he must know and feel that these reading skills are worth learning . . . Our concern is with showing such literature as will make reading worth the effort."
2. Oral exposure to literature it is assumed may quicken the child's ear to the "tunes" of the language, sharpen his sense of syntax, and continue to widen his oral vocabulary. Carl LeFevre in his book Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading (3) has this explanation for the aforementioned "tunes." "The fundamental means of distinguishing sentences from nonsentences is through familiarity with basic intonation patterns. American English intonation consists of relative pitch, relative stress, and related junctures and terminals; these combine into melodies and rhythms of statements, questions, requests and commands." These patterns of intonation are built into the child's cognitive storehouse to be utilized for sentence comprehension when he reads orally and later, to serve as almost an subconscious signaling system when he reads silently and notes punctuation marks, italicized words, and adverbs descriptive of how something was said, e.g. What do you mean? What do you mean? What? Do you mean ----? or, "What do you mean?" he asked resignedly, angrily, quizzically, etc.

3. Oral discussion of the stories read builds a foundation for the interpretation of stories and the recognition of motifs.
4. Writing of original stories is suggested by the story read. These are the levels of "Something created -- Something transmitted" and form a legitimate part of the total reading process. In the first few months of first grade, the teacher prints the story developed by members of the class on the board or on a large, lined experience chart paper. The story is then used for reading instruction -- oral and silent -- and is copied to go into a class booklet of original writings. The class booklets are useful for library material for primary "free reading periods." The first graders on this program are doing a great amount of original writing. Motivation for their writing stems from awareness of the outstanding stylistic characteristic of the stories which serves as a writing model (e.g. repetition of words and situations in folk tales) and the fertility of material which has demonstrated a lasting and basic appeal to the human mind. It might be assumed that "The Little Red Hen", "The Gingerbread Boy", "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" will affect the imaginative and creative sensibilities of first graders more powerfully than do "Look, Jane, look" or "The fat hen sat in the pig's pen."
5. The Language Explorations section of each unit from grade 1 through grade 6, deals with specific vocabulary word meanings; use of punctuation, underlining, illustrations, capital

letters to illustrate graphically the oral intonation patterns; word changes by adding letters or taking letters off; syntactical experimentation by sentence expansion, changed word order, etc.; use of dialect; figures of speech; dictionary use, word derivations.

This listing of what is included in the Nebraska Curriculum for English is not meant to be all-inclusive of the skills covered, but to illustrate that any imposed separation of the teaching of reading from the rest of this language arts program would be an arbitrary and artificial one.

The time periods assigned to both math and science instruction are also large ones. Originally some of the teachers expressed doubts about too much time being allotted to these subject areas for first and second graders. They learned, however, that it is not just the methods of science or the skills of computation that they are to impart, but that the language of the subject is to be taught and that part of that language instruction is teaching reading through the use of math or science content. They are asked to develop reading not from the basal reader but by devising activities that will bring together the language and concepts specific to the subject. They are responsible for teaching the vocabulary used. This involves visual presentation of all new words or terms, sounding out to achieve oral mastery, learning of the appropriate meaning within the subject context, and frequent use of the word or term by the pupil in all subsequent oral or written work. Lists of these words are kept

prominently on view in the classroom or in bulletin board displays. Manipulative devices are employed freely in math where the processed visual symbol system, it is hypothesized (4), must be connected to other kinds of information -- action in the case of mathematics -- if comprehension is to happen. Experience charts are written to relate sequential steps in an experiment, mathematical quantities and measurements used to describe. Practical use and application enable the pupils to comprehend the difference between fact and fiction, author's purpose in communicating, the need for clarity and correct terminology.

It seems relevant to point out that James Stroud (5) has stated that the responsibility for teaching a pupil to comprehend does not rest primarily with the teacher of reading. Comprehension he feels is a generalized ability to the development of which, all teachers and the educative process in toto contribute. The pupil draws from a stored fund of knowledge in all linguistic behavior whether it be reading, talking or writing. If one accepts this premise there is little doubt that the subject area teacher who refers a pupil to the reading teacher for improvement of comprehension has erroneously prescribed. The reading teacher who accepts the assignment and who painstakingly works on teaching the pupil to select main ideas and key words, to read paragraphs and to answer the questions that follow, may find that the pupil's reading comprehension when measured by the subject area teacher in terms of functioning in his class, may show little or no improvement. The key to

unlock the storehouse has been carefully oiled but the storehouse still remains empty. It is the clarification of terms and understanding of the processes or date concerned with the specific subject area that is needed for the improvement of reading comprehension.

The separation of reading instruction from the rest of the curriculum and failure to comprehend its nature as a language skill that must be closely allied to concept formation has produced sterility and staleness in far too many reading programs. Where the elementary grades remain self-contained and one teacher plans each day's total learning experience for the group, there is often a fusing of the reading and language arts that satisfies the pupil's unexpressed but very real need for a logical coherence and purpose for what he is learning. Beginning with the junior high program, however, the reading specialist emerges as a subject teacher in his own right with developmental reading classes separate and apart from those of the English teacher who at this point in the educational set-up generally is of the opinion that somebody else should teach the pupil how to read since he has not been prepared to do so. (The cry, of course, is not limited to the English teachers. Other subject area teachers generally subscribe to the same point of view.) Visits to these secondary reading classes will often reveal that they are nothing more or less than duplications of what is already

being done in the English class. It is not uncommon for pupils at this level to wonder why the need for "reading" and the reading teacher to have a few qualms himself as to the necessity for what he is doing and as to its essential value. Some barricade themselves behind an imposing array of mechanical devices, machines, and boxes of materials or turn gratefully to speed reading. This, at least, thanks to Evelyn Woods, the Controlled Reader, and other mechanical devices, belongs without question to the Reading Department! It should be clearly understood that this is not intended to imply that there is no need for the reading specialist at the secondary level, but rather that his role should be different from the one too often assigned to him as a humble adjunct of the English department or a refugee from the elementary school.

There are times when one wonders if reading experts have not succeeded too well in their struggle to achieve recognition for the need to teach reading. Putting the spotlight on a particular part of the curriculum to define its needs is admirable; to cut it off however may be to deprive it of sustenance and cripple its essential function. If we have succeeded in removing reading from the rest of the curriculum, and boxed it in to a special period and teacher, the need to put it back is increasingly obvious. Departmentalization down to the first grade of school is a growing trend and an inevitable one. The demands for curriculum changes and the changes that have already occurred are making it daily more impossible for the one teacher to know enough to teach all subjects equally well. What the teacher must understand, however,

is that no matter what subject he is teaching, he must at the same time be teaching thinking and developing language competence. Reading is an inseparable part of that language ability.

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